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ON THE

NATURE OF ROOTS AND WORDS.

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ON THE NATURE OF ROOTS AND WORDS.

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The fact that Glottology is still a young science is nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in that branch of it which treats of the nature of primitive language and its sources. The student, standing on the threshold, and approaching this subject free from all preconceived opinions, cannot fail to observe that in this particular at least the inductive stage has not yet been reached. Here facts are rarest and theories most abundant; here disputes are hottest and loudest, and the angry disputants frequently forget the courtesy of scientific discussion, as was the case in the late attack of Professors Steinthal and Max Müller on Professor Whitney. So unsatisfactory indeed have been the results of the discussion hitherto, that many of the most eminent glottologists have given up the enigma in despair, and become thoroughly sceptical as to the possibility of our ever arriving at any definite or positive knowledge on the subject of the origin of language. Bopp, Pott, Lepsius, and many others consider the veil of mystery hanging over this question as absolutely and inexorably impenetrable. Benfey and Schleicher would remove the consideration of this question from the jurisdiction of linguistic science altogether: the former handing it over to Psychology, the latter to Anthropology;* while the Société de Linguistique de Paris absolutely forbids the admission of any communication on this subject by its statutes.

Of late, however, a more hopeful tone has prevailed, owing largely, no doubt, to the increased study of the languages of savage nations, and the philosophic consideration of the phenomena presented by them. For it is here we approach most nearly to primitive man in the matter of language, as in point of every department of culture, and from such facts as we can here gather we must make our inductions as to the nature of primitive language.

* Geiger, Ursprung der Sprache, p. 27, *et seqq.*

It is the object of this paper not to attempt to penetrate any mystery, or to go behind the veil, but rather to show that there is no veil to go behind, no mystery to penetrate; and to point out the fact that in the known phenomena of existing speech we have ample materials for deciding on the nature of primitive language; for I firmly believe that the greater part, if not the whole, of the obscurity in which this subject is shrouded, or supposed to be shrouded, has been created by the dust raised by the disputants battling in behalf of their respective theories, and from their failure to perceive that while, on the one hand, no one theory is sufficient to account for all the phenomena of speech, yet, on the other, all the theories advanced contain a large amount of truth; and error commences in each case at the point where any disputant endeavours to establish his own theory as the only true rule of faith, to the exclusion of all others.

I shall also try to point out that there is no necessity to have recourse to miraculous phenomena of any sort in this inquiry. Those who support the theory of the directly divine origin of language are not the only ones to call the miraculous to their assistance. To my thinking, at least, Bleek's theory of the evolution of language is the most miraculous of all; and not far behind it in this respect is Professor Max Müller's attribution of the power of abstraction to man in his primitive state: of both of which theories, more hereafter.

Before inquiring, however, into the nature of primitive language, it will be necessary to define language itself, more especially in its relation to the first language makers. Language and its object may be defined as "the *intelligible expression of thought in articulate sound as a means of communication between man and man.*"

Some writers define language as being the expression of thought *and feeling*, but I would reply with Schleicher,* that the immediate expression of feeling is not one of the primary objects of language, and that language expresses feeling only in the form of an idea or a thought.†

Having now defined what language is, let us next determine where our inquiries are to commence—at what stage of human progress. There are extreme evolutionists, in linguistic as in biological science,

* Die deutsche Sprache, p. 4.

† The interjections, of course, are the direct expression of feeling, and as such must be excepted from this statement in so far as they are to be considered as a constituent element of language; a point which will be subsequently discussed.

who would trace the origin of speech to the inarticulate cries of the anthropoid ape or pithecoid man, I do not know which. Let Wilhelm Bleek, cousin of the archievolutionist Haeckel, state his own case.

"The fact," he says,* "that conditions similar to those of humanity can no longer develop themselves from animal speechlessness, proves nothing; just as the fact that the progress of a language like that of the Hottentots to the stage of development reached by its no very distant Indogermanic relatives is now impossible, proves nothing."

But if this fact proves nothing, we may at least require that the evolutionist should prove something. I do not, of course, demand that he should develop language from animal cries by actual experiment; but I do most emphatically demand that he should prove the possibility of such development, or of the capacity for such development in the lower orders.

The substance of his argument on this point is contained in a note to the passage above quoted, which reads as follows: "Those classes of animals that stand next to man are, if not externally at least internally, in a different condition from that in which they were at the period when humanity arose. Being as yet hardly formed, they were then not only more susceptible of change, but there also lay in them a stronger impulse toward further progress, and the attainment of a higher stage. This impulse had to be satisfied, as was done in the case of human beings; or, if it remained long without satisfaction, it would necessarily be extinguished, and therewith ceased the possibility of their freeing themselves from the condition in which they were. This condition became all the while more and more confirmed; and what at first was the uncertain advance of a forward impulse toward formation, and, at the same time, the first steps towards a further development of this power, forms now the petrified, stereotyped forms of a species of animals which seems to have long ago been deprived of the possibility of internal change."†

Here, in order to prove something, two groundless assumptions are made to fill the gaps in the logic of facts, to supply the "missing link" in the evolutionary chain, viz.: first, a miraculous impulse of which no proof is given; and, secondly, an equally miraculous capa-

* Origin of Language: American Translation, p. 46.

† I regret exceedingly that the original was not accessible, as the carelessness of the American translator has made the translation barely intelligible.

city for developing that impulse which rests on a similar foundation. In other words, the capacity for development, the *onus probandi* of which lies with the advocate of this view, is taken for granted.

Let us attempt to follow Bleek, however, in the further development of his theory. "Sound," he says,* "is a mere accessory to feeling. Not only is there feeling without it, but it is comparatively seldom that feeling is made perceptible to the ear." Precisely so; and yet from this comparatively rare manifestation of feeling he would derive all language. But the converse of this is also true, viz., that "it is comparatively seldom" that speech is the manifestation of feeling, though perhaps somewhat less seldom with primitive than with civilized man. The object of the first communication between man and man was not to convey feeling, but to satisfy immediate and pressing wants, as we shall see again further on; and to indicate these wants, it was necessary to give names to the things that would satisfy them. If I should have an opportunity at some future time of treating, as I propose to do, of the sources of language, I shall give Bleek's synopsis of his own theory in full, that my readers may judge of it for themselves. For the present, however, I shall content myself with stating that he proceeds to develop interjections from animal cries by the awakening of consciousness, and then to develop all articulate speech from these latter, by a process which I frankly confess my inability to understand.

If this evolutionary theory be the true one, Schleicher is no doubt perfectly justified in relegating the consideration of this question to the domain of other sciences. But comparative lexicography has given the death-blow to the theory that interjections are the only source of language, and has demonstrated the impossibility of such origin for the great majority of Aryan roots at least.

As long, however, as no more positive evidence than this can be adduced in support of the development of speech from the inarticulate cries of animals, the glottologist who desires to avoid the imputation of mere theorizing, and to rely on facts alone, must look elsewhere for the sources of language, and may reasonably refuse to carry back his researches further than to the earliest period at which we have positive evidence of the existence of man *as man;* that is, as a creature endowed with higher attributes than the apes. The startling discoveries made within the last forty years, by the explorations of geologists

* Origin of Language: American Translation, p. 56.

and archæologists, have been assumed to relegate the earliest traces of the existence of our race to a period so immensely remote, as to startle and confound the boldest imagination; an antiquity of hundreds, nay, thousands of centuries being demanded for man. These discoveries have at least proved beyond a doubt that man was an inhabitant of Europe, not only when the mammoth, the woolly rhinoceros, the reindeer and other arctic fauna inhabited the south of France, but also when the lion, the hyæna, the hippopotamus and other animals now peculiar to tropical countries, ranged as far north as Great Britain.

This question of the antiquity of man is, however, of no direct interest to the glottologist, except in so far as it gives a greater lapse of time for the great changes which language must have undergone since its birth. He is more concerned in inquiring whether there be any evidence as to the intellectual capacity of the first of our race, to whose existence these records bear witness.

What manner of men were they, then, of whom we have the earliest traces; the contemporaries of the mammoth and other extinct animals? The river-drift gravel-beds of the Somme, the subterranean cave dwellings of Germany, France and Great Britain, the older among the lake-dwellings of Switzerland, the shell-mounds of Denmark, all give the same answer: the first men were tool-makers and tool-users. Their tools were, to be sure, of the rudest description; but they have outlasted the remains of the men themselves. The direct evidence as to the personal structure of primeval man is confined to a few remains of bones, more particularly to two portions of skulls. Of the more ancient of the two, the Engis skull, considered by Sir Charles Lyell to be undoubtedly coëval with the mammoth and other pleistocene mammalia, Prof. Huxley* says: "It is, in fact, a fair average human skull, which might have belonged to a philosopher, or might have contained the thoughtless brain of a savage."†

The nature of the stone axes and arrow-heads, the flint-flakes, the bone awls, &c., unearthed by these discoveries, is sufficiently familiar to the general reader, and it is only necessary to state that the earliest specimens consist of unpolished stones, rudely chipped to the required

* Man's Place in Nature, p. 156.

† The antiquity of the other relic, the Neanderthal skull, which is "the most pithecoid" of known human crania, is not so well established; and Prof. Huxley himself says (Man's Place in Nature, p. 159), that "the fossil remains of man hitherto discovered do not seem to take us appreciably nearer to the lower pithecoid form."

shape, and bearing what are known as palæolithic characteristics, and that they greatly exceed, in number at least, and probably also in antiquity, any remains of human bones yet discovered. These data may seem very meagre ones from which to draw any valid conclusion as to the intellectual, moral and social condition of these first tool-makers. But it is in the solution of this problem that the science of primitive culture, in the hands of such men as Sir John Lubbock and Professor Wilson, has achieved its greatest triumphs, and been raised to the rank of an inductive science. The archæologists have pointed out that primitive man, so far from being extinct, and known only by his remains, still occupies a considerable portion of the habitable globe, and that "primitive" is synonymous with "savage." They have applied the comparative method, which has produced such wonderful results in the study of language, to their own science, and have inferred the condition of the first men from the phenomena actually observable among existing savage races, many of them still in the palæolithic stage, manufacturing and using tools which are exact reproductions for the most part of those found with the remains of extinct mammalia. Sir John Lubbock* pictures primeval man as ignorant of pottery, spinning and agriculture, having no domestic animals, perhaps not even the dog, unable to count to ten, "his weapons of the rudest character, and his houses scarcely worthy of the name." As to his moral condition, we may add that he was probably destitute of all religious ideas, or of any conception of a future state, and that he was in some cases, though exceptionally, a cannibal. As to his social state, he was certainly gregarious, living in communities of greater or less extent. In fact, he was a savage, wretched indeed, clad in skins and living by the uncultivated products of the earth and the spoils of the chase, hunting the lower animals with most rudimentary weapons of stone, bone, flint, &c.; his wants few, but pressing, and dictated by hunger, thirst and cold.

The picture is dark enough, yet not too dark to be a faithful representation of many savage races at the present day: The Hottentots and Bushmen of Africa, the Veddahs and Andaman Islanders of Asia, the Australians and Feejeeans of Australasia, the Esquimaux and Nootka-Columbians of our own northern half-continent, the Brazilians, Patagonians and Fuegians of South America. Of this any one may satisfy himself by a glance at Sir John Lubbock's most

* Prehistoric Times, 2nd ed., ch. xvi.

interesting sketch of the manners and customs of modern savages, contained in chapters xiv.–xvi. of his "Prehistoric Times."

What then are the characteristics which separate modern savages from the lower animals? They are three in number, viz.: the faculty of making and using tools, the use of fire,* and last, but not least, articulate speech. We have already seen that the earliest human beings of whose existence we have positive evidence, the contemporaries of the mammoth, were, like the lowest of modern savages, tool-makers and tool-users. Traces of their use of fire have been discovered at the lowest depths and in conjunction with some of the most ancient remains in many caves of Great Britain, according to Mr. W. Boyd Dawkins.† How stands the case then with regard to the third point, the capacity for articulate speech? Leaving the use of fire out of the question, and confining ourselves to the first and third points, the argument may be stated in syllogistic form as follows:—

(i) All tool-makers and tool-users are capable of articulate speech;
(ii) The first men of whom we have remains were tool-makers and tool-users; therefore
(iii) The first men were capable of articulate speech.

As, however, we know of no case of the direct invention of language, it remains to be seen whether there is anything in the nature of language to make its direct invention by creatures of such limited mental capacity, as the first men may be assumed to have been, an impossibility or even improbability.

Before, however, we enter upon the discussion of this question, there is another to be answered. We have already seen what manner of men the primitive language-makers, in all probability, were. Let us next inquire *why* they spoke at all—what interests gave them the first impulse to the invention of speech.

This motive is contained in the definition of language given above, as "the intelligible expression of thought in articulate sound *as a*

* Alvaro de Saavedra, as quoted by Lubbock, *op. cit.*, p. 547, mentions a race of savages who were ignorant of fire; and Captain Wilkes, U. S. N., made the same statement of the inhabitants of the island of Fakaafo. The latter statement, however, is questioned by Mr. Taylor (Early History of Mankind, p. 230), on the ground that their language contains a word for "fire." It should be added that some Australian tribes are unable to produce fire, though not ignorant of its use.

† Cave-Hunting, chap. viii.

means of communication between man and man." In other words, the primary purpose of language, or the reason that man talked at all, was that he wanted something, and wanted some one else to know it and to help him in supplying his wants. His motive in using articulate sounds was not the communication of his feelings; his emotions of pain, anger, &c., could have been made known readily and completely enough by inarticulate cries, groans, howls and growls. The motive was the pressing want of the moment. His wants may be summed up in two words: nourishment and warmth. The natural objects which supplied the means of satisfying these were at once the primary cause and object of his first words. These would be edible roots, the fruits of the earth, the earth in which they grew, the plants which bore them; further, the animals he hunted, their skins, bones, &c., and the implements with which he hunted and worked—natural and artificial—sticks and stones, bows and arrows, axes, awls, &c. As man is a social animal, and the unit of society is, as Sir Henry Maine* has pointed out, not the individual but the family, we must add himself, his relations and friends. The sun, moon and stars, the sea and the sky, were all objects of less primary importance to him. From the nature, then, of the names given to himself, his relations and allies, to the edible products of the earth and the plants producing them, to the beasts and implements of the chase, we should be able to infer the principles on which primitive language was formed; and, as we have disposed of the why, we now come to the consideration of the question: What manner of language was it that primitive man made use of?

The answer to this question must be obtained in the same way as we arrive at the determination of primitive man's intellectual, moral and social condition, viz., by the comparative method, by an inquiry into the nature of language as we find it spoken at the present day. Nor will it be necessary to have recourse for this purpose to the languages of savage nations, since the qualities most essential towards the determination of the present problem are, as we shall see, inherent in all language by its very nature, and are intensified in proportion to the degradation of the users of language in the scale of culture. In illustrating the following argument, I shall confine myself almost entirely to ground familiar, more than any other, to the general student of language, viz., the Aryan roots.

* Early Village Communities, Lecture iii.

L. Geiger, in his "Ursprung der Sprache," has shown, with equal force and clearness, that the great distinguishing characteristic of these roots is infinite variability. I shall endeavour to illustrate this fact by examples, drawn partly from his work, and partly from other sources.

If any one will glance at a dictionary of Aryan roots, and the meanings attributed to them, he can scarcely fail to be struck by the fact that here confusion seems to be the order of the day; that, in fact, the state of primitive language answers, to speak with Geiger,* to Ovid's description of Chaos:

> "Prima fuit rerum confusa sine ordine moles
> Unaque erant facies, sidera, terra, fretum."

This confusion arose from two causes: 1st, that one and the same root was used to name totally different actions or objects, sometimes entirely unconnected with, sometimes remotely akin to each other; and 2nd, that the same action or object was indicated by a number of different roots; so that, in reality, any combination of sounds might be used to indicate any action or object, and conversely the same object or action might be indicated by any number of different combinations of sounds.†

The examples illustrative of these variations may be arranged under the following four categories:

I. Variations of meaning in roots identical in sound.
II. Variations of meaning in different words derived from the same root, or from different roots identical in meaning.
III. Variations of meaning in the same word (as distinguished from a root).
IV. Various roots or words expressing the same idea.

I.—Variations of Meaning in Roots Identical in Sound.

On referring to Leo Meyer's Lexicon of Indogermanic Roots (the partial Italian translation is the only shape in which the work is accessible to me‡), I find that of the first fifty-four roots (beginning with the simplest in form) exactly one-half have two or more meanings assigned to them. Of these twenty-seven, fifteen have double mean-

* *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

† *Ibid.*, p. 89, *et seqq.*

‡ Compendio di Gram. Comp. d. antico, Indiano, Greco ed Italico di A. Schleicher, e Lessico d. radici Indo-Italo-Greche di L. Meyer, recati in Italiano da D. Pezzi. Torino e Firenze, 1869.

ings, and five treble; single instances occurring of four, five, seven, eight, and even nine meanings attached to roots identical in sound. It will only be necessary to give the few following examples:—

PA="drink;" whence Skr. *pi-bâ-mi*="I drink;" Gr. *pe-pô-ka*, *po-sis* (="drink"), &c.; Lat. *po-tus*, *po-to*, *po-culum*, &c.

PA="protect," "maintain," "rule;" whence Skr. *pâ-mi*="I protect;" Gr. *po-sis* ("husband"), *des-poi-na*, *des-po-tês*, *po-tnia*, *pa-têr;* Lat. *pa-ter*, *po-tis*, *po-tens*, *po-tiri*, *pa-sco*, *pā-bulum*, &c.*

DA="give," "divide," "bind."

AD (a variety of DA?)="eat," "smell," "hate."

KAR, or KAL (*r* and *l* being interchangeable)="call," "do," "move," "curl," "divide," "conceal," "cook," "gladden."

II.—VARIATIONS OF MEANING IN DIFFERENT WORDS DERIVED FROM THE SAME ROOT, OR FROM DIFFERENT ROOTS IDENTICAL IN MEANING.

My illustrations under this head will be taken from Geiger's work,† already so frequently referred to, and will be confined to derivatives traceable to the single idea of "binding," as represented by different roots, all containing that meaning. The root DA="bind," mentioned above, which occurs in the Gr. *deô* (whence *diadem*, and perhaps *dei*, implying necessity), is referred by Geiger to an older form, *dja*. With this is closely connected the root *dam*="tame," whence, in this signification, Lat. *domare*, *dominus*, &c. The primary signification was doubtless "bind," "join," &c., whence Gr. *demas*, "body," "frame;" *dêmos*, "community," "people;" *damar*, "wife" (*con-JUX*); *demô*, "build," and *domos*, "house;" Lat. *domus*. Corresponding to this root *dam*="tame," we have the Skr. *jam*, with the same signification. Then we have the root *ju*="unite," "bind," to which the same authority refers *zônnumi*, and to which may also be referred the Lat. *jus*, and Engl. *justice*, *jury*, &c. Closely akin to this in sound and meaning is the root *jug*, or *jung*, Lat *jungo*, Gr. *zeugnumi*, to yoke or harness, Lat. *jugum* (and *con-jux*), Germ. *joch*, Eng. *yoke*. To *dam* and *jam* Geiger adds another root, *gam*. Skr. *dampatî* and *gampatî*="husband and wife;" *jama*="twin" and *gami*="brothers and sisters" (*Geschwister*), Lat. *gemini*. Skr. *jâmi*="sister" and "daughter-in-law;" for the latter we have also *gâmâ; gâmâtri* and *jâmâtri*="son-in-law." With this are connected Gr. *gambros*, Lat.

* I only give derivatives with the first examples, as they are sufficiently well known to the general student.

† *Op. cit.*, p. 80, *et seqq.*

gener, "son-in-law, and Gr. *gamos*, wedlock." By the side of this word *gambros* we may place *pentheros*, the Greek word for a father-in-law (from the root *bandh*, whence also Eng. *bind*, and Gr. *penthos* ="grief"), with the passing remark that Euripides and Sophocles invert these significations, the former using *gambros* for "father-in-law," the latter *pentheros* for "son-in-law. From other various roots of similar signification are derivable the Germ. *Schwager*, *Schwäher*, *Schwieger*, all indicating relations by marriage; the Lat. *socius*; the various Indogerm. names for *sister;* the Lat. *nepos*, Gr. *anepsios*, our *nephew*, *niece*, Germ. *Neffe*, *Nichte*, Old Norse *nift*="sister" or "bride," Old High-Germ. *nift*="granddaughter," "niece," "step-daughter." Beside the Lat. *jus* from *ju*, as given above, we may place *lex*, from *lig* (whence *lig-are*), with the same meaning of binding. This by no means exhausts the illustrations that might be drawn from the same source; but quite sufficient has been said to show over what an immense field this one idea ranges, and I must refer my readers for further illustration to Professor Max Müller's interesting treatment of several Aryan roots in his "Lectures on the Science of Language."* The four words *house*, *wife*, *justice* and *yoke* are far enough apart, in fact, to show this, almost without further amplification. Nor do I hold myself responsible for the correctness of all Geiger's derivations: a sufficient number are beyond doubt to fully illustrate the point under consideration.

III.—Variations of Meaning in the Same Word.

These variations must of course be distinguished, on the one hand, from those which are the result of metaphor, or of application extended from one object to others on account of a real or fancied resemblance (*e.g.* the use of the word *beam* for the rays of light, &c.); and on the other, from words of different derivation, that have accidentally assumed the same form (*e.g. cleave*="to adhere;" Germ. *kleben;* and *cleave*="to split;" Germ. *klaffen*). The variations here meant are such as arise from mere indefiniteness of application, from failure or disinclination to invent a new word for the varying conception. As examples of the occurrence of this variation of the same word in different languages, I may mention the English *bell*=*tintinnabulum*, and the German *bellen*="to bark;" Engl. *dumb*="mute;" Germ. *dumm*="stupid" (the word "dumb" being commonly used in the

* First Series, Lectures vi., vii.; Second Series, Lecture vii.

United States in the latter signification, a use not unknown even in this country); Engl. *mist*=*nebula;* Germ. *Mist*="dung," &c. But we need not go beyond the limits of one and the same language for our illustrations. I have already referred to the change of meaning in the Greek *gambros* and *pentheros*, and the Skr. *gâmi*. In the common usage of Southern Germany, *Vetter* means, indifferently, "uncle," "cousin" and "nephew;" and the fem. *Base*, similarly, means "aunt," "cousin" and "niece." So the Skr. *varcas*="brightness" and "dirt,"* and the German *Lohe*="flame" and "tan-bark;"† the Lat. *nepos*="grandchild" and "nephew;" the Greek *kuanos* indicates shades as varying as blue and black. So the Engl. *black* and *bleach* are the same word originally; *fond* means "affectionate" and "foolish." To these might be added words the signification of which has gradually changed in course of time, such as *silly*, *slight* (German *selig*="happy;" ‡ *schlecht*="bad," formerly "straight" or "level,") &c.; but I have preferred to confine myself to varying meanings in use at the same time, and in the mouths of the same people. This variation of meaning is sometimes indicated by a slight change of sound, as Engl. *band*, *bond*, *bound*.

IV.—Various Roots or Words Expressing the Same Idea.

Turning again to the Lexicon of Roots, we find the conception of "binding" indicated by the five roots *da*, *sar*, *bandh*, *ju*, *dja*, if not by more; that of "rubbing," or "crushing," by *tar* (whence *tero*, &c.), and *kar;* that of "going," by *ga*, *ki* (Gr. *kinein;* Lat. *ci-ere*), *ar* (Lat. *oriri*), *par* (Gr. *poreuein*), *sar* (Gr. *hormân*), and others. Of various words in the same language expressing the same idea, we may instance the Engl. *sea* and *ocean*, with the corresponding Germ. *See* (fem.) and *Meer;* the Germ. *dunkel* and *finster;* the Engl. *room*, *chamber*, *apartment;* the German *Zimmer* and *Stube*. These examples might also be multiplied to a much greater extent; but those given are sufficient for our present purpose.

So much as to variability in the content, or meaning, of words and roots. If we consider next their phonetic form, we shall find the same characteristic of infinite variability equally developed.

Roots have been treated by grammarians as things fixed and invariable by their very essence; but many of them are admitted to

* Geiger. Urspr. d. Spr., p. 150.

† Geiger considers them to be the same word.—*Ibid.*

‡ The German *selig*, like the Engl. *happy*, is used in slang as equivalent to "intoxicated."

have phonetic forms primarily different. Thus *ga*="go" is referred to a primitive form *gva*, whence are derived Skr. *ji-gâmi*, "I go;" *a-gât*, "he went;" as well as Gr. *ebê*, *bai-nô*, *bi-bas*, &c., and Lat. *ve-nire; da*, *dja*, *ju*="bind," are mere variations of the same form; *kar* and *kal* have already been referred to as admittedly identical, and the same is the case with *tar* and *tal; va* and *vap*="weave;" *dvi* and *chi*="fear;" *ksi*, *ski*, *ska*="destroy;" *kru* and *klu*="hear;" *gal* and *gla*="shine" (as also *ghar*, which is surely only a variety of form). The roots might be greatly reduced in number by considering the variations of form and meaning, and classifying them accordingly. Thus *kar* and *kal*="curl," also "rub," "crush," may be reasonably regarded as mere arbitrary variations of *tar* and *tal*="rub," "crush," &c., if we take into account the inability of primitive man to distinguish different sounds.* So with *ar*, *par*, *sar*="go;" also *tar*="tremble," "move rapidly."

We must of course allow to primitive language an infinitely greater latitude in its phonetic changes than takes place in a speech more or less fixed by the introduction of writing, and we do, as a matter of fact, find that phonetic changes, as well as changes of signification, are much more rapid with savage than with civilized nations.

"The dialects of barbarian tribes," says Professor Sayce,† "are perpetually altering. There is nothing to preserve them—neither traditions, nor ritual, nor literature. The savage has the delight of a child in uttering new sounds, and exhibiting his power and inventiveness in this manner, with none of the restraints by which civilization confines the invention of slang to the schoolboy and the mob. . . . The barbarian is especially open to all the influences of external nature, climate, food, and so forth, with nothing to check the disintegrating effect these may have upon the combination of sounds." Further on‡ the same authority says: "Nothing is really harder than to keep a language from changing where it is not protected by the habits of settled life." So Max Müller tells us that among the wild tribes of Siberia, Africa and Siam, "two or three generations are sufficient to change the whole aspect of their dialects."§ Nay, more than this, he quotes the statement of Moffat, the African

* Mr. Henry Sweet, as quoted by Sayce, "Principles of Comparative Philology," 2nd edition, p. 246.

† *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

§ Lectures, First Series, p. 35.

missionary, that in that country "*in the course of one generation the entire character of the language is changed;*" * and also tells us of "missionaries in Central America who attempted to write down the language of savage tribes, and who compiled with great care a dictionary of all the words they could lay hold of. Returning to the same tribe after the lapse of *only ten years*, they found that this dictionary had become antiquated and useless. Old words had sunk to the ground, and new ones had risen to the surface; and to all outward appearance the language was completely changed."†

The multiplicity of barbarian dialects is another proof of this rapidity of change. Gabriel Sagard, missionary to the Hurons in 1626, as quoted by the same author, ‡ "states that among these North American tribes hardly one village speaks the same language as another; nay, that two families of the same village do not speak the same language." Again: § "In the neighbourhood of Manipura [near the Irawaddy] alone, Captain Gordon collected no less than twelve dialects. 'Some of them,' he says, 'are spoken by no more than thirty or forty families, yet so different from the rest as to be unintelligible to the nearest neighbourhood.'"

After this digression, let us return again to the changes of outward form. If we begin comparing the varying forms which the same roots have assumed in different derivatives, the examples crowd upon us to such an extent that it is hard to say which we should take first. What can be more unlike in form than Lat. *semetipsissimus* and Fr. *même*; Lat. *canis* and Germ. *Hund*; Germ. *Zahn*, Lat. *dens*, Eng. *tooth* (the last of which has not a single letter in common with either of its foreign relatives)? But few words in an extract from Chaucer would remain unchanged in a modernized version, after the lapse of only a few centuries, which we are now taught to regard as a very trifling portion of the history of the human race. Nor should it be forgotten that phonetic laws originated and came into force, in the Aryan languages for instance, at a period much later than the existence of the language which consisted chiefly of the Aryan roots in the form which is assigned to them by comparative lexicography, when what afterwards developed into a phonetic *law* was merely a phonetic *habit* or *usage*, but still variable, and not prevalent to such

* Lectures, First Series, p. 56.
† *Ibid.*, p. 53. The italics are my own.
‡ *Ibid.*, p. 53.
§ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

an extent as to constitute any departure from it an anomaly, or even irregularity.*

Variations of form in the same word, within the limits of one and the same language, have of course been greatly reduced in number by the stereotyped character of written speech, and its diffusion in this form by the printing press. Still such duplicate forms are by no means rare. We write *i*nquiry or *e*nquiry; a few years ago we called a telegraphic message a telegra*ph* or telegra*m*; and English lexicographers differ widely as to the spelling of a large number of words. Vulgar spelling is, of course, infinitely more fluctuating. If we turn to an older language, such as Latin, for examples, we have scores of such duplicate forms as *adfero* and *affero*, *adlatum* and *allatum*, &c., &c. *Nicknames* constitute another variation of form of the same word. The English language is particularly rich in nicknames that differ widely from the original, *e.g.*, Dick or Dickon for Richard; Harry, Hal, Hank, for Henry; Robin and Bob for Robert; Jennie, Jeannie, Jane, for Johanna, &c., &c. The German furnishes *Hinz* for *Heinrich* and *Kunz* for *Conrad*, and in the southern dialects *Seppi* for *Joseph*, *Nazerl* for *Ignatius*, and a host of others. To these may be added varieties of surnames, *e.g.*, *Robinson*, *Robertson*, *Robison*, *Robeson* and *Robson*; *Boyce* and *Boys*, &c. In point of pronunciation and accentuation, usage is equally fluctuating. So we still hesitate between *either* and *ēither*, and within a short time great variations occur. Similarly accent varies in a short time, and in individual usage. *Bálcony*† seemed barbarous a few decades ago; and with regard to another word, I may say (almost) with Ingoldsby:

> "Re-*main*-der some style it; while others revile it
> As bad, and say *re*-mainder—'tisn't worth while, it
> Would seem, to dispute, when we know the result immaterial—I accent, myself, the penultimate."

The variations of pronunciation, both of vowels and consonants, in different dialects of the same language, are too familiar to require illustration. The South German and the Saxon are notoriously incapable of distinguishing *p* from *b*, or *t* from *d*; the Alsatian makes his *b*, when between two vowels, into a *v*, and says *aver* for *aber*; as the Spaniard makes his *d* into *dh*, or even *l* (*Madrid* pronounced *Madridh*, or *Madril*, whence *Madrileño*, "a citizen of Madrid"); and the Cockney scatters his *h*'s about most recklessly.

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* Cf. Geiger, Urspr. d. Spr. p. 78 *et seqq.*

† Max Müller, Lectures, &c., First Series, p. 36.

Precisely similar results may be obtained from an examination of the component parts of words, the formative affixes; results which may be arranged under similar categories, viz.: various affixes with the same meaning, various meanings of the same affix, and various forms of the same affix. Under the first head, we have the affixes *-dom*, *-hood* or *-head*, *-ric*, Germ. *-thum* (Norse *-domr*), *-heit*, or *-keit*, *-reich*, all identical, or nearly so, in meaning, when considered as affixes merely, and without reference to their derivation; as to the second, the prefix *dis-*, for instance, cannot be said to have precisely the same significance in *dis-cover*, *dis-tend*, *dis-hearten*, nor the suffix *-dom* in *wis-dom* and *king-dom;* and the series of Teutonic suffixes above mentioned will furnish with abundant illustrations under the third category. Thus *-head* and *-hood* are mere arbitrary variations of the same suffix, which is in German *-heit:* we say child-*hood*, but God-*head;* the Eng. child-*hood* corresponds to Germ. kind-*heit*, and Norse, barn-*domr;* the Eng. wis-*dom* to Germ. Weis-*heit* (Weis-*thum* has a different meaning); Eng. king-*dom*=Germ. König-*reich*; bishop-*ric*= Bis-*thum;* and so on, *ad infinitum*.

Such, then, is the material, the outward form of language, even as spoken by the most highly civilized nations, and fixed, as far as language can be fixed, by the diffusion of the written and printed word. The great characteristic of articulate speech, as we know and use it, is infinite variability of meaning and of form, so that, on the one hand, the same word may, in course of time, be at the opposite poles of signification (*e.g. kuanos*="blue," or "black;" *candidus*="white"); and, on the other, words identical in meaning and derivation are as far apart as possible in form (*e.g.* Fr. *larme*, and Eng. *tear*). The ruder and more uncultivated the language, the more fluctuating its forms and the meanings attached to them; and most fluctuating and unstable of all the speech of the primitive language-makers.

How, then, is this infinite variability and fluctuation, this "confusion of everything with everything else," as Geiger calls it, consistent with our definition of language, as a means of *intelligible* communication between man and man? What power was it that brought order out of this chaos? The answer has been hinted at already: this agent is *habit*, or *usage*. The case cannot be better stated than in the words of Geiger:*

* *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

"In the development of particular meanings, a great number of external circumstances have a share; in general, however, LINGUISTIC USAGE (*Sprachgebrauch*) may be regarded as the combining cause of the particular meaning attached to a word. Linguistic usage is *the habit of using a word in a particular sense.*"

Both the significance and the form of a word are first changed by habit, then fixed by usage. These changes may, in fact, be defined as *differentiation by the usage of the majority in a majority of cases of application.* The habit of using a word alone keeps it in existence: lose the habit, and you lose the word.

These variations, however, must not be regarded as the result of *conscious* change on the part of the language-makers, for all *habit* is *unconscious.* Primitive language, the creature of unconscious habit, is incapable of metaphorical application. When a word became the arbitrary sign of an action, object or idea, its original meaning and derivation was lost sight of, and ceased to be present to the mind of the speaker. The meanings of words change in a regular succession as determined by habit and usage, "the last link of the series having no clear connection with the first."* We have seen that the Gr. *damar*, "wife," is connected with *damao*, "to tame;" yet the idea of taming (or of binding, which is the root meaning) was of course never present to a Greek when he used the word; nor did he think of *penthos*, "grief," when he spoke of his *pentheros*, "father-in-law." So it is only by a conscious effort of thought that we connect *wedlock* with bolts and locks. Of course the fundamental idea contained in the root was the reason of its *original* application in the particular sense; but once *habitually* used in this sense, consciousness ceased, and the fundamental meaning was completely forgotten.

Having determined then that primitive man often indicated the same idea or object by different names, and widely different and even contradictory ideas by the same name, let us inquire why and how he as a general thing indicated similar objects by similar names. This inquiry is, in fact, identical with the vexed question as to the capacity of the primitive language-makers to form general ideas, and with that of the priority of general or particular names. Prof. Max Müller is one of the chief upholders of the priority of general ideas, and of primitive man's capacity for forming them. His argument may be best stated in his own language, as follows: "Man," he says,†

* *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

† Lectures on Science of Language, Second Series, p. 64.

could not name a tree . . . or any object . . . without discovering first some general quality that seemed at the time most characteristic of the object to be named." To this we answer that such abstraction is totally incompatible, not only with the intellectual capacity of primitive man, but with intelligibility, which was postulated as an attribute essential to constitute language a means of communication between man and man. "We have only to state the proposition," says Professor Sayce,* very truly, "to see how absurd it is. . . . There is no common bond of intelligibility between such universal ideas. . . . These abstract ideas must either be the last result of reflection, the universals arrived at after a long course of education, or else must be of the vaguest and most unmeaning character. In the first case, we are ascribing to the barbarian the mind of the civilized man; in the second case, any language at all would be out of the question. Two persons could not talk together in vague generalities, more especially when their conversation would be mostly confined to the bare necessities of life."

Man, to be intelligible to his fellow-man, must have named objects, not from a *general*, but from a *particular*, quality. For his name was first applied to an *individual* tree or other object, in which some *particular* quality struck him as its most prominent characteristic; and it was then applied to all individuals which bore a *general resemblance* to the first individual tree or other object named, though the difference might be wide indeed, and the *particular* quality which was the cause of the original name entirely absent. Thus general names, as used in primitive speech, arose from confusion, from inability to distinguish differences or failure to notice them, not from any miraculous power of abstraction and generalization, a power utterly wanting in the savage, *i.e.* in the primitive man of the present day. So a child will call a butterfly a bird, as it was originally called a fly, on account of the *particular* quality of flying common to both; and a leech a fish, because both swim; and most people call a whale a fish, because they are ignorant of the difference. So the South Sea Islanders called the horse a "man-carrying pig," according to the Rev. William Ellis, "the hog being the quadruped with which they were most familiar, and the name serving in their limited vocabulary as the generic designation for every other four-footed beast."† Now,

* *Op. cit.*, p. 220.

† Life of W. Ellis, p. 38.

surely there is no *general* resemblance between a pig and a horse; the name was given, on the contrary, from the *particular resemblance* of four-footedness, to which was added the *particular difference* "man-carrying." I have no access to any Polynesian vocabulary, but I very much doubt whether these savages had a word to indicate the abstract word "quadruped;" and it should be particularly observed that they did not call the horse a man-carrying *quadruped*, but a "man-carrying *pig*." The Oxford professor himself* quotes a similar story of the naming of the dog by other savages in the same way from the pig. This, I suppose, he would attribute to a general resemblance; and he goes on to say: "It would, however, very soon be felt as an inconvenience not to be able to distinguish between a dog and a pig. . . . How could that be effected?" The answer is contained in the instance given above, viz.: that a *particular resemblance* caused both animals to be at first designated by the same name; and when it was desired to distinguish them from each other, a *particular difference* was used to mark the distinction.

Indeed, all the phenomena of savage languages go to prove the incapacity of the savage to form abstract ideas. As Professor Sayce well says:† "In fact, the notion is absolutely contradicted by what we observe among modern savages. Here the individual objects have names enough, while general terms are very rare. The Mohicans have words for cutting various objects, but none to signify cutting simply; and the Society Islanders can talk of a dog's tail, a sheep's tail, or a man's tail, but not of tail itself. 'The dialect of the Zulus is rich in nouns denoting different objects of the same genus, according to some variety of colour, redundancy or deficiency of members, or some other peculiarity,' such as 'red cow,' 'white cow,' 'brown cow.'"

Again, Professor Max Müller says:‡ "All naming is classification, bringing the individual under the general; and whatever we know, whether empirically or scientifically, we know it only by means of our general ideas."

To this I reply that we acquire our general ideas of objects by the cumulative process of making the acquaintance of many different individuals, and of the *particular* attributes common to all of them. "It is the *particular*," says Geiger,§ "not the *individual*, that is the

* Life of W. Ellis, p. 311.
† Principles of Comparative Philology, p. 221.
‡ Lectures on Science of Language, Second Series, p. 385.
§ *Op. cit.*, p. 107.

opposite of the general. Only the individual has a real existence, but each individual combines within itself the particular and the general. The *general* is only what is common to several individuals" (and is therefore synthetic by nature, and of later growth), "the *particular* is what distinguishes individuals."

What has hitherto been said may be summed up in the following statements :—

I. (*a*) That the grounds on which the possibility of the evolution of articulate speech from the inarticulate cries of the lower animals has been advocated are insufficient and untenable.

(*b*) That our inquiries as to primitive language should commence with primitive man, *i.e*, with the first men of whose existence as men we have positive evidence.

II. (*a*) That the earliest human beings of whose existence we have such evidence were tool-makers and tool-users, and that their tools were of the same kind as those used by savage races now in existence, *i.e.*, by the primitive man of the present day.

(*b*) That all tool-makers and tool-users known to us are capable of articulate speech, and actually use it; and that therefore

(*c*) The earliest human beings of whose existence we have evidence were capable of using, and probably did use, articulate speech.

III. That the phenomena of language, as spoken at the present day, and as it has been spoken within the period of which we have historical evidence, furnish us with data amply sufficient to enable us to draw, by a process of inductive reasoning, the following conclusions as to the nature of primitive words :

1°. That the most prominent general characteristic of all language is its infinite variability and constant fluctuation, and that in two respects, viz. :

(I.) In respect to content or significance.

(*a*) The same sounds were used to name different objects ; and, *vice versa*,

(*b*) The same ideas were named by different sounds ; and therefore

(*c*) Primitive names were infinitely variable in meaning.

(II.) In respect to form the variability was equally great.

2°. That in respect both to meaning and form, the determinative cause of the preferential use of a particular meaning, or form, was individual habit developed into general usage, which caused similar objects, in course of time, to be indicated, as a rule, by similar sounds, in the same community, and gave greater stability, and therefore greater intelligibility, to language.

3°. That the variation of meaning, the application of the same names to different objects or ideas, could only take place when the idea which was the primary cause of the use of the particular name had been entirely forgotten, and had become a mere arbitrary outward sign.

4°. That primitive language, in order to be an *intelligible* means of communication between man and man, must have dealt only in concrete or individual names and in particular ideas, and that abstract names and general ideas were the result of a subsequent process of comparison between the different individuals, with regard to a number of *particular* attributes common to many, which caused the general resemblance to be perceived.

Surely there is nothing miraculous in the direct invention of a vehicle of communication, an engine of thought, so unstable, so variable, so fluctuating as this, and yet so easily fixed by means so natural and unconscious as habit and usage, and at the same time so perfectly answering the purpose for which it was created or invented.

We have, however, considered language only in one aspect—with regard to the isolated word and its content. Now Professor Sayce, in his very ingenious and interesting work on the "Principles of Comparative Philology," has lately pointed out, with great force and clearness, that language consists not only of words but of sentences. The word bears the same relation to the sentence that letters do to words. A letter is nothing by itself, nor can a word express thought, except as a member of a sentence. The interjection can express emotion, not thought; and to this the imperative of the verb is akin in usage, though not in origin.

We have, therefore, as yet only completed half the task proposed; we have described the nature of primitive words as abstract and isolated things, incapable of conveying thought. We have still to

consider the nature of primitive words in relation to each other; in other words, the nature of primitive grammar.

With regard also to the other task which we set ourselves, namely, to prove that the direct invention of language was a thing within the capacity of the lowest savage, or, in other words, of primitive man, one-half still remains to be done. We have attempted to show that *general* names could *not* be primarily intelligible; we have still to show how *individual* names could be made so. In other words, we have to determine the sources of primitive language.

As, however, this paper has already greatly exceeded the limits originally proposed, these subjects must be left for future discussion.